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DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS HONG KONG

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TAGS: PFDR, PINT, CH, US

SUBJECT: ASSESSMENT OF PRC PREMIER HUA KUO-FENG

REFS: PEKING 1048, PEKING 1049, PEKING 1054

1. SUMMARY: DURING OUR 1 HOUR 45 MINUTE CONVERSATION ON JUNE 10, PRC PREMIER HUA KUO-FENG IMPRESSED ME AND USLO OFFICERS PRESENT AS AN INTELLIGENT, BUT COLORLESS INDIVIDUAL WHOSE HALLMARK IS CAUTION. HE HANDLED HIS MATERIAL WELL ENOUGH, BUT HE GAVE OFF NO SPARKS OR UNUSUAL INTELLECT OR CHARISMA. HUA CAME ACROSS AS AN IDEAL TRANSITION FIGURE WHO IS UNLIKELY TO TAKE ANY DRAMATIC IN EITHER INTERNAL OR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, AND IS THUS UNLIKELY TO HURT U.S. INTERESTS. WE HAVE HAD CONSIDERABLE DEBATE IN USLO OVER WHAT HUA'S CHANCES ARE OF LASTING PAST AN EARLY TRANSITION PERIOD. SOME THINK HUA CAN PUSH HIS COMPETITION ASIDE LIKE BREZHNEV DID. BUT BASED ON THE MEETING, I DOUBT HUA HAS THE VISION OR THE LEADERSHIP QUALITIES NECESSARY TO MAKE IT OVER THE LONG TERM. I EXPECT HIM IN TIME TO BE SHOVED ASIDE BY A MORE DYNAMIC LEADER. END SUMMARY.

2. HUA GIVES THE APPEARANCE OF BEING PHYSICALLY SOFT WITH THE CHUBBY, WELL-FED LOOK CHARACTERISTIC OF MANY CHINESE BUREAUCRATS. HE IS ABOUT 5FT. 10 IN. AND WEIGHS PERHAPS 180 LBS. HIS FACIAL EXPRESSION IS MOSTLY IMPASSIVE BUT ON OCCASION IT CHANGES FROM A BENIGN, BUDDHA-LIKE COUNTEenance TO THE TOUGH,

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SOMEWHAT SINISTER APPEARANCE CAUGHT EXCEEDINGLY WELL IN THE APRIL 19 ASIAN EDITION NEWSWEEK COVER. WHEN THE EYES NARROW, HUA LOOKS EVERY INCH THE CHINESE SECURITY CHIEF. HE SPEAKS WITH HEAVY SHANSI ACCENT THAT USLO OFFICERS, AND EVEN INTERPRETER NANCY TANG AT SOME POINTS, HAD TO STRAIN HARD TO FOLLOW.

3. THE PREMIER CONDUCTED THE MEETING WITH AN AIR OF CALM, EVEN SERENITY, AND CONFIDENCE. THERE WERE NO SIGNS OF NERVOUSNESS--HE DID NOT FIDGET AND SMOKED MODERATELY BY CHINESE STANDARDS (PERHAPS FIVE CIGARETTES). HUA AVOIDED ANY BUT THE BRIEFEST EYE-CONTACT WITH ANY OF US, CHOOSING INSTEAD TO STARE FORWARD OR AT THE CEILING BOTH WHEN TALKING AND LISTENING. WHILE DOING THIS, HOWEVER, HE CONVEYED THE APPEARANCE OF THINKING, NOT BOREDOM. HIS DELIVERY WAS CAREFUL, DELIBERATE, AND UNANIMATED, DEMANDING SOME PATIENCE FROM HIS LISTENERS. HE SHOWED LITTLE EMOTION DURING MY PRESENTATION AND DID NOT ONCE RAISE HIS OWN VOICE FOR EMPHASIS OR TO DISPLAY INTENSE INTEREST. HE WAS POLITE, BUT FORMAL AND THERE WAS NO EASY BANTER. EVEN HIS "SMALL-TALK" FOLLOWED A PREDETERMINED SCRIPT.

4. HUA IMPRESSED US AN INTELLIGENT MAN, ALTHOUGH HE IS OBVIOUSLY STILL FEELING HIS WAY ON FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES. HE TOOK FOUR PAGES OF NOTES DURING MY PRESENTATION AND REFERRED TO THEM IN HIS EXTEMPORANEOUS REPLY. HE HAD BEEN GIVEN A SHORT BRIEF ON THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER WHICH HE USED WELL AND THEN APPARENTLY DREW THE REST OF HIS REMARKS FROM RECENT BRIEFS PREPARED FOR VISITS BY OTHER FOREIGNERS. HE DID NOT ADDRESS OTHER CHINESE POLICY EXCEPT TO ASK FOR THE NAME "SONNENFELDT" AND TO CHECK HIS INTERPRETER WHEN HE DID NOT CATCH THE CHINESE TERM FOR NORTH VIETNAM.

5. HUA SEEMED IMPRESSIVE IN PICKING STRATEGIC POINTS OF MY PRESENTATION, PARTICULARLY THE REFERENCE TO GROWING UNDERSTANDING BY THE AMERICAN PEOPLE OF SOVIET HEGEMONIC AMBITIONS. HOWEVER, HE DID GET INTO TROUBLE ON A FEW DETAILS: LIN PING SEEMED UNCOMFORTABLE WHEN HE DWELT OVERLY LONG ON SINO-JAPANESE RELATIONS; HE MENTIONED THE "SONNENFELDT DOCTRINE" BUT THEN DID NOT SEEM TO KNOW WHAT HE SHOULD SAY ABOUT IT; HE APPEARED TO OVERSTATE WHAT CROSLAND AND MERY HAD SAID ON DETENTE; AND HE SEEMED TO LOSE HIS TRAIN OF THOUGHT TOWARD THE END ON EGYPT. ALL IN ALL, HOWEVER, HUA SHOWED HE COULD STAND ON HIS OWN FEET IN THE SESSION AND HIS PRESENTATION WILL PRE-

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SUMABLY BECOME MORE POLISHED WITH TIME.

6. WHILE INTELLIGENT, HUA STRUCK US AS COLORLESS AND BY NO MEANS AN INTELLECTUAL. HE WAS METHODICAL AND CAREFUL IN HIS NOTE TAKING AND PRESENTATION. BUT THERE WAS NOTHING IN THE MEETING WHICH APPEARED TO SPARK HIS PARTICULAR INTEREST; THERE WAS NO INCLINATION TO EXPLORE NEW GROUND AND NO INTEREST IN ANY AREAS BEYOND THE BRIEF. HUA DEFINITELY DOES NOT HAVE THE PERSONALITY QUALITIES ASSOCIATED WITH CHAIRMAN MAO OR CHOU EN-LAI, NOTEVEN THE PEPPERY, DECISIVE VITALITY OF TENG HSIAC-PING. DURING THE MEETING, HE ALSO DID NOT DISPLAY THOSE QUALITIES WESTERNERS NORMALLY ASSOCIATE WITH A CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER AND DID NOT APPEAR THE KIND OF MAN WHO WOULD ATTRACT A DEVOTED FOLLOWING.

7. PUTTING TOGETHER WHAT WE SAW OF HUA IN THE MEETING WITH WHAT IS KNOWN OF HIS BACKGROUND, WE CONCLUDE THAT HE IS A CAUTIOUS MIDDLE-ECHELON TYPE WHO WOULD BE MOST AT HOME COORDINATING POLICIES. WE SUSPECT HUA IS A COMPETENT ADMINISTRATOR--HE APPEARED TO EXHIBIT THE RIGHT QUALITIES IN OUR MEETING--AND AVOIDS GIVING OFFENSE BY MASKING HIS OWN VIEWS AND EMOTIONS BEHIND A BLAND EXTERIOR. ON OCCASION, HOWEVER, HUA LOOKED LIKE HE COULD BE TOUGH AS NAILS AND THE WAY HE HAS MOVED UP IN THE PRC STRUCTURE SUGGESTS HE KNOWS HOW TO ACQUIRE AND USE POWER. WE SUSPECT HE UNDERSTANDS THE VALUE OF CUNNING AND TIMING AS SUBSTITUTES FOR INTELLECTUAL SPARKLE AND ATTRACTIVENESS. A MEMBER OF MY STAFF WITH CONSIDERABLE SERVICE IN TAIPEI COMMENTED ON HUA'S SIMILARITY TO CHIANG CHING-KUO IN THIS RESPECT.

8. FROM THE MEETING, IT IS HARD TO SAY ANYTHING DEFINITIVE ON HUA'S VIEWS OF AMERICANS OR SINO-U.S. RELATIONS. IN DUCKING BI-LATERAL TOPICS, HUA PROBABLY MEANT TO SUGGEST NOTHING MORE THAN THE PRC WOULD WAIT UNTIL AFTER NOVEMBER BEFORE TALKING SERIOUSLY ON THE ISSUES. HE WAS CORDIAL IN THE MEETING BUT MADE NO PERSONAL FRIENDLY REFERENCE TO THE UNITED STATES NOR DID HE PASSIONATELY DENOUNCE THE SOVIET UNION. HE WAS CAREFUL, HOWEVER, TO EMPHASIZE THAT HE WAS CARRYING OUT CHAIRMAN MAO'S POLICY TOWARD THE UNITED STATES. GIVEN HUA'S GENERALLY CAUTIOUS APPROACH WE THINK HE WOULD BE UNLIKELY TO RADICALLY CHANGE CHINA'S POLICY TOWARD EITHER THE UNITED STATES OR THE SOVIET UNION FOLLOWING MAO'S DEATH. HE WOULD BE MORE INTERESTED FIRST, IN ANY CASE, IN CONSOLIDATING HIS POWER OR, AT LEAST, ENSURING THAT HE REMAINS

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THE TOP.

9. WE ARE OF TWO MINDS ABOUT MAO'S CHANCES OF STAYING AT THE TOP THE PRO POWER STRUCTURE. ALL OF US AGREE THAT HUA SEEMS AN IDEAL TYPE FOR CARRYING OUT THE TRANSITION THROUGH MAO'S DEATH AND FOR A TIME THEREAFTER. IN THIS PERIOD, HUA CAN BE EXPECTED TO COORDINATE POLICY, WORKING WITH A STEADY HAND TO PRESERVE THE STATUS QUA WHILE DISPUTES AND PROPAGANDA ARGUMENTS SWIRL AROUND HIM. SOME MEMBERS OF MY STAFF WHO WERE IN THE MEETING WITH HUA THINK HE HAS A FAIR CHANCE OF ELIMINATING THE COMPETITION AND MAKING THE NECESSARY ALLIANCES TO CONSOLIDATE HIS POWER LIKE BREZHNEV HAS IN THE SOVIET UNION. THEY FEEL HE HAS THE NECESSARY TOUGHNESS AND SHREWDERNESS TO BRING THIS ABOUT. THE COURSE OF CHINESE INTERNAL AS WELL AS EXTERNAL POLICY WOULD THEN REMAIN FAIRLY STEADY WITH A LITTLE INNOVATION. MAO MIGHT FIND THIS SORT OF OUTCOME DISTASTEFUL BUT IT WOULD NOT NECESSARILY BE BAD FOR EITHER CHINA OR THE UNITED STATES.

10. HOWEVER, BASED ON MY IMPRESSIONS OF HUA FROM THE MEETING, I AM MORE NEGATIVE ABOUT HUA THAN MY STAFF. I DOUBT THAT HE HAS WHAT IT TAKES TO BE THE REAL NUMBER ONE. HE DID NOT APPEAR TO ME TO HAVE THE VISION OR LEADERSHIP QUALITIES NECESSARY TO MAKE A COUNTRY WITH SUCH SEVERE PROBLEMS RUN AND DEVELOP. I THINK NEW AND BETTER QUALIFIED LEADERSHIP WILL ARISE CENTERING ON DEMANDS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF THE ECONOMY AND DEFENSE CAPABILITIES, AND THE COLORLESS MR. HUA, HAVING FULFILLED HIS HISTORICAL PURPOSE, WILL BE FORCED TO STEP ASIDE.

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